



# **AN ARTIST MORE A TERRORIST LESS**

*TEA TUPAJIC*

# AUTOWHAT?!

**In** the beginning was autonomy: a refusal to consider art as merely expressing ideas and operating within the dominant ideologies of Religion, States, Kingdoms and so on. Now that the dominant ideology is capitalism and there is no space whatsoever outside it, not in art as not anywhere else, what do we mean by autonomy? What is it to be autonomous in art except to fully embrace the individualism of the global market (but feeling better about oneself)? Everything smells like fascism: right wing governments are raising everywhere, the european economic policy is destroying any trace of social or globalization and support, europe becomes a fortress, an unlivable place both for the ones that want to get in and the ones inside that have

been ordered to 'tighten their belts'. Why do we want now to claim again the autonomy of art?

The current attack to art is part of an attack to society at large. It comes at the same time as austerity measures are imposed on 'poor' european countries and reforms are killing the university systems all over europe. What's happening to art can't be looked at as an isolated problem or fight, that's why autonomy may not be the most useful concept now.

Autonomy has gone bad. After managing to create a little more free space for art to exist otherwise, autonomy became a pretext to reduce art to high-level entertainment for the bourgeoisie, intellectuals and anyone needing a short break from the desert of working life. It made of art a 'world on its own', with

its players, territories, systems of valorization, set of practices and so on: in other words, an autonomous market. It basically became the opposite of autonomy. It made artists depend on funding like pandas depend of WWF. It made artists accept that they are 'exceptions' and should be protected and supported, unlike the other workers of other sectors who need to strive for profit just to survive. And it's nice to work for pleasure, to reflect on your practice and ethics, to be able to fail and make attempts. But why the access to these privileges should be reduced to artists alone? Is art more needed or more beautiful than anything else that men can do? Why can't a shop keeper apply for funding so that he can work less or not be slave of wild competition?



why does an artist have to continue producing work all the time just to keep her status and access to funding?

Coming back to the pandas, why to make a campaign to save one specie when the whole ecosystem is about to collapse?

Same goes for art, why do we want to save art as we know it instead of making art proliferate? can it be a social reactivation of art? a politicization of art? an 'artification' of society? Whatever, anything that would allow art to become something else than what we already know and that is anyway dissatisfying. It's a chance to re-think artistic practices as capacities active in the social composition, why do we really want to safeguard the liminal armless position that art has been assigned and we have happily fulfilled until now?

Why don't we co-opt the cuts and turn them against the governments and the economical policy that guides them?

Not even the government thinks that by cutting the funding artists will stop, on the contrary, they will continue working and creating value but now economical-

ly taking care of themselves. It's just a management strategy, a way to reduce useless labour costs. And sadly this is what will really happen if we try to defend our little privileges instead of taking this occasion to re-think what we can do, what we are able to do and do it.

It's silly to keep dividing ourselves into categories of belonging (like 'artist', 'employee', 'shop keeper'), the only aim of these categories is to delimit a market, separate fields of exploitation. Why don't we instead start to think of ourselves just as people that have different and ever-changing set of capacities, that depend on one other, that can group and regroup ad infinitum, capable of self-organization?

What if to cut art, social and education funding could actually reveal to be the neoliberal regime's biggest mistake? What if people would start to disregard institutions and start making art, education and society themselves? That would actually be closer to autonomy, but an autonomy that is busy with generating life and therefore cannot be autonomous from itself.

Of course there is always

the risk of just free-working, of continuing creating value for free and being co-opted, but there is also the chance to create other systems of valorization, since the crisis is so radical and investing all aspects of life. There's a lot to make and to invent, a whole society, innumerable forms of life. Do we want to defend the autonomy of art or shall we put our highly skilled and pretty hands right in the middle of the dirt, not afraid of making a mess? Not afraid of failing or of not having a plan, capable of acting from the present in which we find ourselves, giving up categories and opening up to futures we're not yet able to imagine, cause they don't depend on us alone or on a plan to which we have previously agreed?

(Valentina Desideri)



# PRIN BEZNA NOPTII

(TROUGH THE WOMB OF NIGHT)

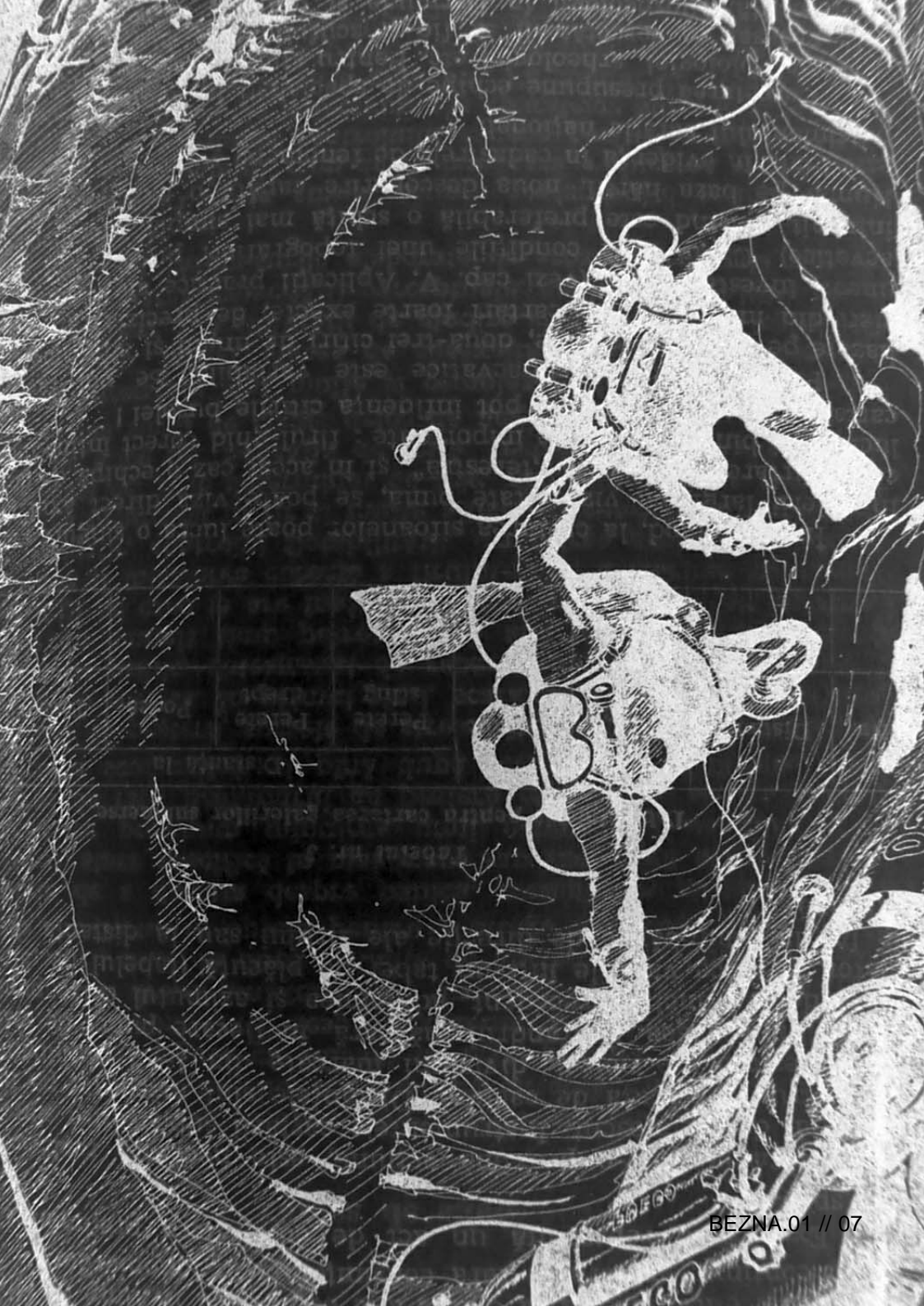
Bezna is a Romanian (and also Slavic) word for pitch black situations, for the all-surrounding and endless darkness that you have to face with what you've got, using your digits and hands, your soft feelers or your sensitive antennae tips.

My small contribution on the Bezna issue about autonomy is based on a Promethean childhood reminiscence by Soviet popular science writer Boris Stepanovici Jitkov (1882-1938). Jitkov is now a forgotten figure, but he wrote some incredible children stories about technology in 1927. His highly imaginative and experimental booklet about the wonders and mythologies of technological progress was translated in 1949 as part of a new series of educational tracts for the Communist youth published as "Science for the Teens". After the chapter relating the story of the

printing press, the tools of trade and the new publishing technologies, Jitkov's wrote a small story titled "Light without fire", a whole chapter about understanding and exploring the wonders and mundane power of electricity, light-bulbs, dynamos, coils, and fuses. He recalls for us some of the most distant memories and feelings related to the arrival of electrical light. This reminiscence recalls the figure of the mighty electrician. After finally installing the new system the electrician said "Lo and behold! Its ready!". And using a switch he made all the small jars glow filled with light, and again to immediately plunge everything - with a small insignificant "tric"-noise into deep darkness and bewilderment. The darkness afterwards was even stronger after the eyes got used to the new light. After the electrician left, there was big skepticism in the air. Do we depend on the electrician? Can his light be switched back or does he have the single magic and unique touch? Everybody tried his luck with the switch in a row. Small Jitkov's turn came, and he couldn't believe that

the switch really did the job for him, that even after the electrician left, you and others could eventually managed to switch the light on and off. He was so sure that nobody could switch the light on and off by himself that he kept on testing the on/off button as if to prove himself wrong. It was a big wonder to discover that the switch could be operated this way by apparently everybody else, himself included. But the fact still lingered on, that there was a switch to be reckoned with. And maybe one could see this as a first gregarious economic action of repeatedly probing and pausing the growing switchboard of modern circuitry. In fact he never stopped being suspicious about his abilities, and even after hundreds of on and off times, he still kept checking the switch's reliability to switch darkness on and off. (STEFAN TIRON)





# A SHORT GUIDE FOR BUILDING AUTONOMY AS AN ARTIST

Autonomy it's hard work.

If you're a newcomer in the EU, or an outsider, focus on multicultural projects, cultural exchanges between your country and the former west, consult the official European cultural politics and join in, find the institutions and organizations that can fit you're domain and are financially solvable. If you're a veteran EU member you already know where to place your energy.

Think of an application and the whole process of applying for funds as an art form, a sort of self-expression.

Transform the doc-labor into joyful and meaningful work in progress. It's a genuine creative process nowadays.

Deadline. You need a deadline, no work is done today without a good and focusing deadline. It mobilizes you, it gives you the incentive to produce the best, the works of art are already there, the shows, the performances, exhibitions are within you, they just need to be surfaced through a harsh market procedure. Apply, apply, apply!

Apply in parallel to several institutions, with different propos-

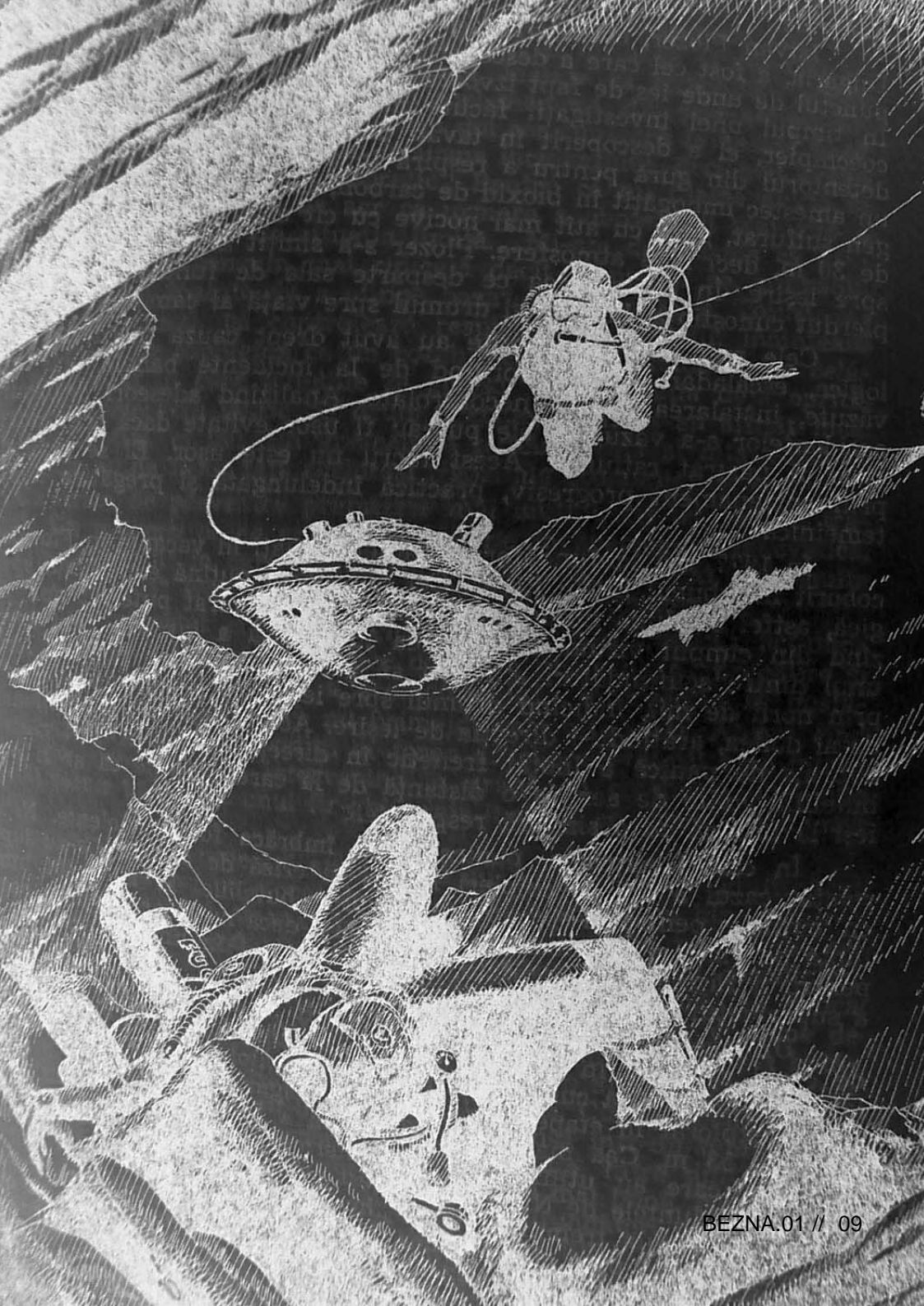
als, modify the same project if needed and send it around. One has to be constantly exposed and on the move. Even in collaborations keep your distinct image and individual characteristics because after a collective work you are on your own again.

Be your own personal PR and manager, trust no one in these matters, improve your economical skills, be your own deadline!

Try to travel (and any other activity) as less as possible on your expense.

Although we live in cognitive capitalism you may still have to





rent your body (especially as a performer / dancer). Residences are good of course, they buy you time to organize for the next residence, scholarship, prize festival, stipendium, workshop in the north.

Cynicism and reality are intertwined, no time to untangle them, precarity lurks at every corner. Go, go, go!

Opportunity, cynicism and depression. All these perspectives (used in the right way) can produce plus-value in the art market.

Scan for a bank in your city with a cultural or humanitarian Stiftung (or something similar). If there are rumors that a bank is to open a new franchise insist in finding the connections. Imitate behavior.

Be the first to know, take political positions. Update yourself at any cost!

Go in poor neighbor-

hoods around your city and find cheap spaces to rent for art purposes, try to build communities (get funding from anywhere) and then be their leader through budget control. Other artists may already be around, make contact and see where that goes.

Be in the network, all the networks available, use real names, fictional and project accounts. Frenzy networking might save your autonomy (career).

Stay away from volunteers, they have zero autonomy and their good will is contagious. Minimum contact with them at social and art events.

What kind of art?

Although it matters in some degree, for now that's the least of your concerns.

Be careful with shining ideologies that you can

not reify all the way, sometimes curators and new institutions are very sensitive although it's not a conspiracy, there is no escape.

Soon one will comprehend that it's hard to avoid labor, get funding and still keep away from political implications. Whatever you engage yourself into keep in mind that it's difficult to maintain the purity surf-board on high tides. Self-discipline and self-corporation are on the horizon, you will have to make tough decisions dealing with hierarchy, exploitation and friendship.

Sell everything also on the art black market, concrete objects, bits of installation, graphics, dvd's, articles but also ideas and concepts (even better), put your soul on the table, don't worry it was already there.

Beware of lumpen free

lancers (lumpen as a state of mind), jackals that would lower themselves to anything in order to extend the project's budget or to climb the professional ladder. Their endurance and effort disponibility is almost imposible to top. In the best scenario institutionalization will be their arrival point. For now this guide considers a dif ferent kind of autonomy.

Go uninvited (or as spectator) to art fairs, festivals and big art events (biennales, documenta etc.) and make contacts, share, sell, present yourself unfathomably but prolific, at hand you should have memory sticks, blogs addresses, cd's and dvd's with "the work". Don't get tired or disappointed, in terms of `autonomy that's the equivalent of death. Be relaxed when you approach the future contributor, don't be hasty by plunging

directly into your projects, first begin with the major issues of the day or discuss the artist's show you just attended. The performance starts here!

Check constantly the political agenda of international and local cultural institutions, work with it and reasonably against it, try to improve the institutions themselves through any means.

Upgrade the art gallery, make directors and curators understand the plus-value you can bring in their environment, shake up the bank foundation from its moral relaxation, acknowledge collateral damage and reveal the strict hierarchy (only) outside of that particular context. They will never invite you again if you take them, the guests, as subject for criticism.

Watch for baby curators from inner and

outer space, from within or outside your island, they are usually in groups following a daddy curator on a very close orbit, in the case of the dance/performance field watch for baby programmers (not so many unfortunately). You need to make contact with them and strengthen any bond.

Locate alpha pups in emerging art groups, mingle and stick with them.

Make parties and organize debates, invite the art world and the omega characters from your cultural context. (ION DUMITRESCU)



## AN ARTIST MORE A TERRORIST LESS

### AN ARTIST MORE - A TERRORIST LESS

In Romania during the so called "communist period" there was what they called "the resistance through culture". In the sense that some artists and intellectuals didn't compromise to praise the dictator, but at the same time they didn't take any risks, they went with the regime doing their art and now they pretend that they were dissidents. They are very badly judged now. They are called "collaborators". Paradoxically they are more badly judged than the obvious collaborators. People accuse them that it was their responsibility to criticize the regime and because they didn't do it, they legitimized the regime. It was their responsibility to set how the struggle should look like and what they provided was a kind of a fake resistance, succeeding in this way to steal potential from other kinds of resistance.(1)

Same now. There is the obvious collaboration, the clear example being the "creative industries" and the artists that are "sent" in problematic places, in slums, between immigrants or in "emergent" countries to prepare the terrain for "democracy" and capital - the stalkers of capital, like in the past the catholic priests were sent in

colonies to introduce the christianity and the economic thinking.

But more problematic is the fake resistance, the subtle collaboration. The so called "political art", the majority of "critical theory" that are carefully attentive not to pass some clear limits. It is problematic because they are setting the tone of how the resistance and critique in society should look like.

Analyzing how media works, Chomsky noticed a kind of interiorised self-censorship, an interiorised authority at the core of it. The tendency is to self-adjust to the "normal"/official perception, to the status quo. People automatically take the frame of the superior publications, which take the frame of officials, which take the frame of the financial sustainers. The self-censorship is not so much about what information is presented, it is more about the perspective about reality, about the implicit paradigm from which the reading of what's happening emerges.(2)

This kind of analysis can be easily extended to art and to entire cultural component. The artist, like the journalist, is in a chain of economic-political power relations. He's the subject of a pressure from above - curators, programmers, which are the subject of a pressure from politicians or banks/corporations (via financial support). From this point of view the artist is a link between of ficials and the subjectivities it addresses, an important piece in a

chain of power influences.

The majority of the population is sufficiently "covered" by the mass media and entertainment, apparently the contemporary art play a small role in the big picture. Maybe from the quantitative point of view, but from the point of view of how power operates, the target of high culture (contemporary art, academic theory, etc.) is tremendously important because it assimilates and addresses the marginal people that are more at unrest, emancipated, unsatisfied, activists, critical, etc. Foucault noticed that the power always focused to assimilate, to integrate or to criminalize/annihilate this dangerous, more marginal, independent subjects.(3)

Art (and Academia) seems to be some of the best solutions for assimilating, absorbing, discharging and disarming in its key points the resistance, dissent, revolt and frustration accumulated in society. It works like a substitution, it swallows real struggles, the real potentiality and transforms them into consumable spectacular cultural products like art. It is an appropriation of struggles. This accumulation of struggles creates the cultural (and artistic) bubble, a luxurious prison where the dangerous people, thoughts, concepts and intentions are domesticated.

### ART BUBBLE (Art is infinitely better than reality)

Ranciere is enthusiastic about the fact that aesthetics were set since the beginning AN

to work on the egalitarian principles:

"The very idea of Art - of the aesthetic experience - as defining a specific sphere of experience was born in the late eighteenth century under the banner of equality: the equality of all subjects, the definition of a form of judgment freed from the hierarchies of knowledge and those of social life."(4)

I think we can spot here a fundamental problem - the fact that art was set since the beginning to answer to this important needs and aspirations in an alternative reality - to function as a substitute that enables an abstraction from the concrete ideologico-political constellation. Religion offered this kind of compensation-refuge further in time, in the next-other life, art seems more efficient and can give a compensation now, but not here - in alternative realities, escaping in spaces of creativity, representation.

Freud considers that "life as we find it is too hard for us; it entails too much pain, too many disappointments, impossible tasks. We cannot do without palliative remedies... There are perhaps three of these means: powerful diversions of interest, which lead us to care little about our misery; substitutive gratification, which lessen it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it. Something of this kind is indispensable."(5)

Art/aesthetic seems to be a good "remedy" that plays all

this three palliative functions so needed to cope with the inequality, exploitation, domination and precarity of life. Art can be seen as a space in which you can play with "radical" changes in a safe and inoffensive environment - a provided, institutionalized place for critique and experiment in order to keep the status quo outside of it. Ranciere and with him others artists and theorists, says that art is already political just because it exists and modifies the regime of sensible, producing emancipation, etc. Of course these theories are a big hype among artists because they justify and provide rationalizations for "my art is my activism" attitude. It is very convenient, you just stay in your art studio and work at the level of finesse and sensible, and you are in the same time revolutionary, subversive and so on. You are a radical artist without touching on the power relations. You keep the privileges and you do resistance at the same time.

## THE MORBID SIDE OF CULTURE

Everybody is happy - the artist, the State, the Capital. The Power don't want the artists capacities, intelligence and knowledge to be used in real dissent activities or in real protests. So, since ever, the power is friendly with the artists. They always had a privileged place at the King/Capital court.

We can see the cultural component as the domain of biopolitics, where the power

invest in the people's capacities for different reasons - to integrate and assimilate dissent, to softly control the critical discourse, the values and references in society or just to harvest the artists productivity after.

The cultural component can be included in what Chris Hedges calls the soft language of power - "the language of beneficence is used to speak to those outside the centers of death and pillage, those who have not yet been totally broken, those who still must be seduced to hand over power to predators"(6). The brutal language of power, the war component, the morbid capitalism is the domain of necropolitics, where the power is a disinvestment in life, is more an administration of death, war and brutal exploitation. It is reserved to the periphery of capital in the violent expansion zone where things are turbulent and the power is classical, not subtle, not hidden behind benevolent appearances. The morbid component is for the second world a bit and for the third world a lot.

The morbid component for the periphery cannot exist without the consent of the center, without the cultural component.

And the cultural component, all the financial speculations, immaterial labor, etc. cannot exist without a base, without the classical power, violent exploitation, without the war component for the periphery. In a way all the immaterial labor and the cultural compo-

nent are more a way to administrate and externalize the death politics in the periphery of the capital. The cognitarians are just the administrators of the very concrete and brutal production that happens in the periphery. But the periphery is coming closer and closer to the first world. The cuts in fundings for arts, humanities probably means also that the cultural component is not so needed anymore - it is not necessary or it is not working anymore to keep up the appearances, the illusion. So there is a move of the morbid component towards the center. Probably it is better to hope that artists will always be rich...

### THE FINAL CRISIS

The morbid and the cultural (spectacle) component put a huge pressure on the subject creating an universal capitalist subjectivity which constantly reinforces the capitalist reality. So it is a vicious circle - a constant unbreakable loop. The capitalist expansion reached all the populations, all the resources and the limits of the earth. The economic-financial paradigm is omnipresent, addressing the totality of life - at the level of the organization of society through the power of the neoliberal dogma and at the level of subjectivity where probably the last fight, for the most intimate human "resources", capacities, sensibility, intimate desires, believes, is happening now.

We can say that the ultimate battle is in the cultural domain which is almost entirely occupied by the economic logic. Probably in this context if we want to produce a change, first of all we have to go out or against the institutionalized art bubble. White cube and black box provided a bit of oxygen in a stable society and a suffocating environment. They played a function then, they were important. But now is possible much more, the times are changing. We should help that art bubble to burst, the crisis to work. Maybe now, in the crisis there is an opportunity for us to go out from the assigned art bubbles and to use our time and skills to intervene on the biggest stages (mass media, politics). Maybe is time for art to go where things happen. To interrupt the flow of spectacle, the institutional chain of passing the cultural agenda. Not to listen and even sabotage the administrative protocols in art - the artist has to become a cultural terrorist. "Terrorist" is a label that points towards any enemy, potential danger to the establishment. The terrorist and the little brothers, pirates and hackers are the only ones that are not assimilated and integrated in our society.(7) And there is another level where we also should go. If capitalism is modelating our cultural core, we should go at that level too - to radically work, experiment with subjectivity. Not just to play safe in the realm of representation

with creativity but to experiment with essential human behaviours, values, perceptions, attitudes. If we really want something to change I think we have to go a bit beyond our comfort and alter the core of our identities. If we are Capitalism, the exploitation, the extinction of species, the climate changes, at least some parts of us have to transform radically or even die. In this sense, maybe we have to embrace a bit of cultural (artistic) apocalypse. **(Florin Flueraș)**

1. See Stefan Tiron, 10 years of beautifying misery in Bucharest, <http://caminultaucultural.blogspot.com/2011/05/premises-10-years-of-beautifying-misery.html>
2. Noam Chomsky, Necessary Illusions, Pluto Press, London, 1999;
3. Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge, random house, US, 1981;
4. Jacques Ranciere, Art of the possible, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0268/is\\_7\\_45/ai\\_n24354911/pg\\_6/?tag=content;coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_7_45/ai_n24354911/pg_6/?tag=content;coll)
5. Sigmund Freud, Civilization And Its Discontents, Buckinghamshire: Chrysoma Associated, 2000;
6. Chris Hedges, Recognizing the Language of Tyranny, <http://jerichorendezvous.wordpress.com/2011/02/07/recognizing-the-language-of-tyranny/>
7. See Dorato Action at Pavilion Unicredit as a cultural terrorism example: <http://florinflueras.blogspot.com/2011/07/dorato-action.html>



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